United Nations A/58/343/Add.2

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 February 2004

Original: English

Fifty-eighth session
Agenda item 129
Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the in-depth review of its statute and working methods

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly an addendum to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the in-depth review of its statute and working methods.

04-24284 (E) 010304

I. Introduction

1. In 2003 the Joint Inspection Unit submitted two reports on its statute and working methods to the General Assembly, the first entitled "Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the preliminary review of its statute and working methods" (A/58/343) and the second, "Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the in-depth review of its statute and working methods" (A/58/343/Add.1). The latter included a number of actions suggested by the Assembly.

2. Although both reports were discussed under agenda item 129 during the main part of its fifty-eighth session, the General Assembly, in its decision 58/564, decided to defer to its resumed fifty-eighth session further consideration of the item. While the Unit still awaits guidance from the Assembly on the issues and proposals developed in the two aforementioned reports, it has pursued its internal process of reflection and reform with a view to advance in those fields which do not necessarily require legislative approval or direction. The present addendum has been prepared therefore to acquaint the Assembly with progress made in the Unit since the end of the main part of its fifty-eighth session.

II. New measures

3. As indicated in the Unit's preliminary review, the Unit has worked in recent months on the development of internal working procedures to complement the standards and guidelines that it adopted in 1996. Those internal working procedures have now been finalized and adopted by the Unit. They include, inter alia, a set of principles, parameters and criteria, as well as a time frame and benchmarks, for the preparation and adoption of the programme of work to ensure that it is balanced and composed of topics which have been chosen from among clearly identified risk areas and opportunities and which have been subjected to a thorough screening and analysis.

4. New mechanisms have been developed to implement the strategic framework adopted by the Unit in 2003, in particular as concerns conducting risk assessment, selecting topics for reports and improving the quality of reports. The new procedures and mechanisms should have a direct and immediate impact on the mode of operation of the Unit as well as its administrative arrangements and have a bearing, in the longer term, on its functions and responsibilities.

A. Functions, powers and responsibilities

5. In accordance with the principle stated in the preliminary and in-depth reviews that the Unit's work should be guided by a strategic framework based on a regular and comprehensive assessment of risk in its participating organizations, pilot risk assessment exercises were conducted over the last few weeks on five of those organizations. On the basis of those exercises, the Unit will adopt in the coming months a common methodology to extend the exercise to other organizations.

6. Once the methodology is established, it is expected that the exercise can be carried out for each participating organization, in consultation, as appropriate, with concerned secretariats and relevant internal and external oversight bodies. The

assessments will be updated on a yearly basis. That will assist the Unit in identifying programmatic, managerial and administrative areas in the United Nations system that present an element of risk and where it can add value.

B. Mode of operation

7. The exercise will be supplemented by a thorough validation process through which each proposal for the subject of a report or note, whether developed internally or submitted by executive heads of participating organizations, will be tested against a number of set criteria and rated by the Unit. That process was already applied in the selection of proposals for the 2004 programme of work and elements taken into consideration in the selection of topics for reports or notes included:

- Potential efficiency gains and/or financial savings
- The identification of a specific problem or opportunity that the Unit can help to solve or promote
- The relation of the subject to any major initiative, such as the United Nations reform, the Millennium Declaration and other items on the agenda of the United Nations system
- The relation of the subject to an immediate priority of Member States.

8. Conversely, negative factors, such as possible duplication of existing or planned reviews by other oversight bodies and the actual capacity of the Unit to undertake a given study, were also considered in drawing up the Unit's programme of work for 2004. As a result, the programme of work, composed of 10 new items, is clearly focused on concrete topics where potential savings can be identified, or that are of relevance to Member States' pressing concerns. Other issues contained in the 2004 programme of work relate to issues of governance as well as efficiency in the use of technical cooperation resources. It should be noted that among the 10 new items, two respond to specific mandates received from legislative organs and five stem from suggestions made by participating organizations.[1]

9. No less important is the peer review process foreseen in the new internal working procedures and through which the Unit will exercise its collective responsibility for the preparation of reports, notes and confidential letters in accordance with its statute and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, in particular resolution 56/245, paragraph 9. More specifically, a review of the validity of each topic included in the programme of work is to be carried out after completion of a preliminary desk review, through which initial assumptions and the existence of baseline indicators will be verified.

10. Finally, the first and final draft reports or notes will be discussed in official meetings, which will focus on verifying that the draft report or note and its recommendations are:

- Directed at correcting clear deficiencies with practical, action-oriented measures to solve significant problems
- Convincing and well-supported by the facts and analysis in the report
- Realistic in terms of implied resource commitments and technical capabilities

- Cost-effective
- Specific regarding actions to be taken and those responsible for taking actions so that implementation and the resulting impact can be clearly tracked
- Faithful to the original purposes and objectives
- In conformity with the approved selection criteria
- Concise and reader-friendly.

11. The new internal procedures also foresee, as an interim provision until the General Assembly takes a decision on the issue of collective wisdom, that if the author(s) do not agree with the comments of the majority of Inspectors, the author(s) may decide to have the report or note issued solely under her/his/their responsibility, in accordance with the first sentence of article 11.2 of the statute. In such a case, the report will contain wording to that effect. The wording will also refer to the criteria or benchmarks that, in the opinion of dissenting Inspectors, were not observed.

12. A series of other measures to improve efficiency have also been implemented, such as the completion of a number of information technology-related projects, including the launch of a redesigned Joint Inspection Unit web site (www.unsystem.org/JIU), expected for the end of March 2004 and the development of an Intranet, as well as the finalization of several databases. Through such databases, the Unit has recorded and organized information available to it on the handling of reports and follow-up to the recommendations they contain and on contacts in participating organizations. It has also indexed all previous reports by topic for easy retrieval.

C. Administrative, budgetary and financial arrangements

13. The new internal working procedures will also enhance the Chairman's ability to exercise a more pro-active role in leading and managing the work of the Unit, beyond his/her statutory role as described in article 18 of the statute. The procedures provide for the Chairman to ensure compliance by the Unit with the provisions of its statute as well as the standards and guidelines and internal procedures, as foreseen in paragraph 10 of General Assembly resolution 56/245.

14. It is expected that the measures outlined above will greatly contribute to improving the efficacy of the work of the Joint Inspection Unit. While the Unit will continue to pursue its reform efforts, as described above, it is of great importance that the General Assembly now pronounce itself on those issues that were highlighted in the Unit's preliminary and in-depth reviews.

Notes

[1] As per normal practice and in compliance with article 9.2 of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, the full programme of work will be conveyed to the General Assembly through a document to be issued in the coming weeks.